

TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION

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GOVERNOR APPOINTS MEMBERS TO INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION

AUSTIN – Today Governor Rick Perry issued a [press release](#) formally announcing appointments to the initial Board members of the Texas Indigent Defense Commission. A law passed during the 82nd Legislative Session, HB 1754, granted the Commission new autonomy and renamed the agency, which was formerly known as the Task Force on Indigent Defense. These actions required the Board to be reconstituted to create the initial governing body of the Commission. The appointments by the Governor herald the official move from Task Force to Commission.

The first official meeting of the Texas Indigent Defense Commission was held today in Austin. The Board selected Judge Sharon Keller to serve as the Chair and Jim Bethke was appointed to serve as Executive Director.

Chair Keller stated that the Board looks forward to continuing the improvements in indigent defense initiated by the Task Force. She stated, “We have ten years of experience behind us, and the continuity in Board membership allows us to immediately address the needs of Texas counties through the implementation of evidence-based practices and targeted funding.”

Commission Executive Director Jim Bethke echoed Keller’s sentiments and stated that much of the progress made by the Commission has centered on data, implementation of new programs, and distribution of state funds for indigent defense. Bethke stated that the data collected “brings transparency and accountability in indigent defense systems because counties are able to document exactly how many cases are represented by court-appointed attorneys and the costs associated with those cases.” He continued, “research-driven decision making is at the heart of what the Commission does,” playing a role in the new programs that are developed to meet local needs, as well as the distribution of over \$30 million in state funds each year.

State Senator Rodney Ellis said, “Congratulations to the newly appointed board on its achievements over the last ten years. I look forward to continue working with new commission as we face the serious challenges ahead.” Senator Ellis was the principal author of SB 7 creating the Task Force on Indigent Defense in 2001 and a co-sponsor of HB 1754 this past session that created the Texas Indigent Defense Commission.